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# TRENDS AND ISSUES REPORT

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*Youth Employment Centre Hiring Fair*

The Calgary  
Achievement Centre  
for Youth, August 2012  
to August 2013

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## Introduction

The Calgary Achievement Centre for Youth (CACY) is a collaborative that brings together a number of service partners to provide comprehensive supports to “at risk” youth in order to increase their participation in education/employment opportunities that will position them for a more positive future. Partners include Calgary Board of Education – Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes and Discovering Choices (DC) outreach school; Calgary Catholic Immigration Services – Immigrant Youth Outreach Project (IYOP); Catholic Family Service – Aboriginal Youth Worker, Child Minding and Outreach; City of Calgary – Youth Employment Centre (YEC); and McMan Youth and Family Services (McMan). The CACY collaborative uses a three pronged strategy to support at risk youth:

- 1) Co-location of a number of key services in one facility in order to create a more accessible youth friendly environment, enhance service opportunities for youth, create efficiencies through shared resources, and strengthen the capacity of partner agencies
  - 2) Satellite program locations that are linked to the main programs at CACY (e.g. Discovering Choices school satellite locations at Marlborough, Westbrook, and Bowness).
  - 3) Outreach services to extend supports to vulnerable youth into the community
- Informal partners join with CACY in response to emerging client needs. Informal partners include Alberta Health Services, Addictions counseling services, the YMCA Downtown, Calgary Construction Trade Association. The 2012 CACY survey of front line staff affirmed that the collaborative model has enhanced the ability of partner agencies to connect with at risk youth and to meet the needs of clients with 80% of the partners reporting improvement in reaching the target population. Through the collaborative CACY partners have been able to increase their knowledge about services, programs and resource people in the community, to develop important relationships between service providers, improve the ease of the referral process, and have a greater overall impact. In the CACY partner survey, 100% of respondents indicated that the CACY collaborative increased their ability to have a greater impact with at risk youth than they could have had working on their own.

The following report illustrates the ongoing trends and issues at CACY. Because CACY is a collaborative each partner operates as an independent services organization with its own mandate, funding and reporting/accountability structure. CACY partners do not report directly to the collaborative, but collect information specific to their own accountability criteria and funder requirements. There is currently no agreement or format for common data collection across the collaborative. However, CACY partners do meet on a regular basis to discuss their individual experiences (based on their own statistics) in order to identify needs and trends across organizations, and to plan collaboratively for additional supports/services that will benefit CACY participants. The trend information presented in this report is a collection of data and reports made available by partners, as well as CACY reports that reflect collaborative discussions.

## CACY Participant Trends

CACY participants experience a myriad of issues in their lives that combine to create complex personal and situational issues and barriers. Core issues may include moderate to severe cognitive or learning disabilities and/or social emotional problems that create serious challenges for engagement in the education system and high school completion. Underlying these learning challenges are mental health problems such as depression or anxiety disorders, and in some cases addictions. Along with these personal challenges,

youth are struggling to deal with serious family issues, poverty and housing instability. The Discovering Choices School received 1854 students in total in the 2012/13 school year, and the following characteristics were represented in the student population:

- <sup>1</sup>43% of students were coded as having either severe or mild to moderate cognitive/learning disabilities, physical disabilities or emotional/behavioural problems (20% severe; 26% mild to moderate)<sup>2</sup>
- 47% of students enrolled are male; 53% female students
- 15 % of students are Aboriginal<sup>3</sup>
- 59% of students were “independent” (i.e. not living with parents)<sup>4</sup>

Many of the youth accessing services at CACY have the added challenge of being young parents.

- 75 young parents used the Child Minding services provided on site in 2012; 60 of these were regular users and 15 young parents accessed the drop-in.
- 99 referrals were received at Discovering Your Opportunities program in which young mothers worked with Commitment Coaches (Youth & Family Outreach Workers) and accessed school credit-based paid work experience in the summer program. This program is offered by the Youth Employment Centre in collaboration with the Louise Dean School

The Youth Employment Centre served 1959 clients in 2012, 329 (17%) are Aboriginal and 588 (30%) were clients who had dropped out of high school. YEC delivers services to all youth 15-24, providing career and employment services and delivering specialized programs to vulnerable youth.

- DYO summer and enhancement program
- Project Protégée
- Jump \$tart
- Born to Be
- Vulnerable youth outreach programs
- Wage subsidy program (work experience)

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<sup>1</sup>40.4% (after Sept 30) + 45.4% (before Sept 30) / 2 = 42.9% of new enrollments

<sup>2</sup>Coded 40s (severe): 20.3% (before Sept 30) + 19.0% (after Sept 30) / 2 = 19.65% ; Coded 50s (mild/moderate): 25.1% (before Sept 30) + 27.0% (after Sept 30) / 2 = 26.05%

<sup>3</sup> Based on September 30<sup>th</sup> 2011 enrollment figures.

<sup>4</sup>Based on September 30<sup>th</sup> 2011 enrollment figures.

The Youth Employment Centre Jump \$tart program targeted 15 and 16 year olds for the 3-week summer employment skills program. 25 youth participated in 2012, building confidence, developing employment readiness skills and completing a work exploration placement during the final week. The Youth Employment Centre attracted 3,500 youth to its 14th annual Youth Hiring Fair in 2012.

The Immigrant Youth Outreach Project (IYOP) served 338 immigrant/refugee youth for the most recent reporting period, up slightly from last year.<sup>5</sup> The IYOP has seen an increase in the proportion of newcomers from East African countries and the Middle East, such as Iraq and Iran. This is reflective of a shift in source countries of new referrals in light of changes in the patterns of refugee claimant acceptance at a national policy level. In the past year the proportion of new referrals for youth from China and India has decreased. Staff have also noticed differences in the services sought by clients from different immigration categories. For example, refugee clients access IYOP for structured assistance and trouble shooting, whereas activities such as music lessons seem to be accessed by Family Class immigrants or children of Skilled Worker category immigrants, who may be better situated in Calgary and more easily explore extracurricular activity opportunities.

The Young Adult LINC program developed English language skills, learning strategies, academic and employment skills with 40 full time newcomer students aged 18-24 in 2012.

The CACY Aboriginal Outreach Worker met with 67 clients in 2012. The worker connects with Aboriginal youth, develops relationship with them and provides basic needs support and social/emotional support to help reduce barriers to school completion. The worker also facilitates relationship building among the Aboriginal youth and assists them in accessing resources within the CACY Collaborative and throughout the city.

McMan Youth Services offers support to CACY youth in the form of housing and basic needs.

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<sup>5</sup>The reporting period was for April 2012 to March 2013.

## CACY Participant Challenges

In the spring of 2013 CACY conducted a survey of 53 participants, consisting of 17 Aboriginal youth, 19 Immigrant youth and 17 other youth. The following data shows the prevalence of issues reported by the youth themselves, and illustrates some of the differences within the youth population served at CACY.

### Issues and Challenges Identified by CACY Youth

Challenge	Aboriginal Youth N=17	Immigrant Youth N=19	Other Youth N=17	Total Across Youth Populations
Lack of Money	65%	47%	41%	51%
Transportation	41%	26%	25%	34%
Depression/Anxiety	41%	5%	47%	30%
Lack of Motivation	53%	0%	41%	30%
Housing Issues	59%	16%	6%	26%
Lack of Family Support	35%	21%	18%	25%
Alcohol/Drugs	29%	0%	12%	13%
Childcare	18%	0%	18%	11%
Working part time	18%	11%	0%	9%
Working full time	6%	11%	6%	8%
Lack of Tutoring	6%	11%	0%	6%
No Barriers or Challenges	0%	0%	24%	8%

**“The most Significant challenges identified were lack of money, transportation issues, depression/anxiety and lack of motivation”.**

## CACY Service Trends

Data from Discovering Choices illustrates some of the trends seen in the student population at CACY over time. The following information compares participant profiles from 2004 and 2011.

- **Increased Demand:** Enrollment has more than increased five fold over the past eight years from 377 students in 2004 to 1,854 students in 2012, highlighting a continued trend in increasing demand for more flexible alternative education options (i.e. CBE Outreach education). From 2011 to 2012 Discovering Choices saw a 67% increase in the number of students (from 1113 to 1854). Awareness among community agencies about the outreach school is growing, resulting in increasing numbers of referrals to Discovering Choices
- **Younger Students:** CACY staff observed an increase in younger students in 2012.
- **Increased Interest in Employment Skills:** Discovering Choices staff have observed an increase in the number of Knowledge and Employment (K&E) student referrals for Discovering Choices. K&E courses are designed to provide entry-level employment skills for students who have expressed a goal of leaving school before earning the requirements for a senior high school diploma, although some students may transition successfully from Knowledge and Employability courses to other courses to achieve a senior high school diploma, or to continuing education and training opportunities. YEC staff have also noticed that in some cases younger clients are looking to develop employment skills, but are not necessarily seeking employment or ready to enter the workforce. They are preparing for the future.
- **Slight Increased in Aboriginal Students:** the number of Aboriginal students has more than tripled from 4% in 2004 to 15% in 2012 – up slightly from 12% in 2011.
- **Slight Increase in Immigrant Students:** The CCIS Immigrant Youth Outreach Program (IYOP) served 338 immigrant and refugee youth aged 15 to 24 over the past year, a slight increase over 2011.
- **Decrease in Incidence and Severity of Learning Challenges:** The overall number of students accessing Discovering Choices school who are coded for cognitive/learning challenges has dropped by almost one third, down to 43% in 2011/12 from 62% in 2010/11. The proportion of students coded for severe challenges decreased to 20%, down from 28% in 2010/2011 (this is however still double the 10% of students with severe challenges in 2004), and similarly the proportion coded for mild to moderate challenges decreased to 26%, down from 34% in 2010/2011.

- **Reported Increase in Mental Health Issues:** In the CACY partner survey, staff reported an increase in clients presenting with mental health issues.
- **Multi Service Use at CACY:** A CACY front line staff survey indicates that 88% of referrals are made to CACY partner agencies, up from 53% in 2010. Although CACY partners do not collect data on the specific number of referrals to internal partners, the CACY partner survey found that among client referrals to partners within CACY, 85% of respondents had referred clients to Discovering Choices School; 89% had referred clients to the Youth Employment Centre, 65% had referred clients to Child Minding, and 59% had referred clients to Aboriginal Youth Outreach, and 76% referred to McMan Youth Services. DYO staff noted that many DYO clients returned to CACY to access services of the YEC.

## Specific Needs and Issues

### Poverty – Meeting Basic Needs

The majority of CACY participants are low income and struggling to meet basic needs. This is an ongoing issue for CACY participants and service partners. CACY staff have observed an increase in youth poverty based on increasing numbers of clients reporting unstable living environments, emergency shelter use, street involvement, homelessness, lack of income, unemployment, and lack of family support. CACY staff heard from older students that they couldn't afford the costs of attending Chinook College and other institutions for high school completion. Many youth who came to CACY were working full-time or seeking full-time work while taking high school courses.

Youth may obtain basic needs supports through Discovering Choices or through referrals to other community agencies such as for health needs through The Alex and clothing support through Dress for Success. The ease of referral between the YEC and Discovering Choices helps to address the important issue of youth unemployment. The youth unemployment rate is consistently double the rate for those Calgaryians aged 25 and older. Youth unemployment contributes to disengagement from community and chronic poverty.

The CACY bursary fund of \$23,303.00 was awarded by a selection committee made up of CACY collaborative members and helped 137 students in 2012.

## Homelessness and Unstable Housing

Due to the level of poverty experienced by the majority of CACY participants and their age, appropriate affordable housing remains an ongoing issue. CACY staff have found there are more clients living in shelters, on the street, or couch surfing. McMan Youth, Family and Community Services received referrals from the CACY Collaborative.

## Transportation

Since most of the participants at CACY are low income, transportation is an ongoing issue. Last year DC gave out \$25,000 transportation supports (e.g. bus passes and tickets) to the four locations. IYOP provided \$3588 for bus tickets to their youth to get to and from the office for supportive services. Supported Referrals

The Discovering Your Opportunities – Enhancement program found that providing transportation accounted for the highest proportion of support activities provided by the outreach workers. They found that providing bus passes is typically not adequate for DYO clients who are young mothers with children, and that other agency workers in the community do not provide direct transportation services to youth. By accompanying the young mothers to appointments and to the Food Bank, the Youth & Family Support Worker supported young parents to advocate for themselves and care for their families. The ability and flexibility of the Youth & Family Support Workers to fill this role was seen as invaluable. With the high demand for this service the workers found it difficult to respond to all requests for rides.

## Child Minding and Parenting Support

Last year the CFS Child Minding service engaged with a significant number of pregnant students at the Marlborough location. This year a number of those students have transferred to the Child Minding services at the downtown CACY location. Other parenting students at Marlborough receive outreach support. Accessing program space at the Marlborough location continues to be a problem.

The DYO Commitment Coaches – Enhancement program and DYO summer life skills and work experience program was developed to support pregnant and parenting young mothers lacking community supports and life skills. The Commitment Coaches (the Youth & Family Support Workers through YEC) were able to intervene, provide support and spend time with the young mothers that other staff could not offer, especially in crisis situations. DYO clients typically had very high needs, having made very few plans for the delivery of

their baby, often not planning for basic needs until it was an emergency. The Commitment Coaches provided services related to medical needs, housing, accessing food, promoting nutrition, child care, and other community resources, as well as accompanied young mothers to appointments.

## Mental Health Concerns

In the CACY partner survey, staff reported an increase in clients presenting with mental health issues. CACY staff describe depression, anxiety, and conflict management challenges among mental health issues impacting youth academic achievement. In 2012 the CACY Coordinator met with a psychologist from Catholic Family Service and made arrangements for the psychologist to spend one half day per week at CACY to meet with youth who are referred by partner agencies.

## Case Examples

The youth at CACY face ongoing issues of poverty, unstable housing, low paid employment, mental health, substance abuse, pregnancy and parenting, and family dysfunction that continue to create barriers to education completion and future success. The following case examples illustrate the ongoing complex challenges that CACY service partners support on a daily basis.

### Support for the Working Poor

Jack, 24, is a visible minority client who came to the YEC for assistance covering the cost of training required as a condition of starting a better paying job. He had been having a difficult year and had suffered several losses. When he came to the YEC he was working at a commissions-based job and struggling to make ends meet. He had been successful in lining up a new job through an energy company which he could begin as soon as he completed the required training. CACY assisted Jack to access the Bursary Fund so that he could obtain H2S Alive and Fall Protection training, in addition to completing CPR/First Aid through the YEC. Once he had completed this training Jack was able to pursue his new job, and is now doing well financially.

### Education and Employment Support

Dani, 20, was new to Canada from Ghana. She was a LINC student referred to the YEC by a friend and looking for her first job in this country. Dani had previously worked as a

grocery clerk in Ghana, but was unfamiliar with Calgary and the job application processes. At YEC, Dani obtained assistance creating a resume as well as building her job search skills. She created a resume and brainstormed a list of potential employers located near her home. Staff also provided counselling about the steps of effective cold calling and devised a script for Dani to use with potential employers. Dani found employment as a customer service representative at a coffee shop. When she later connected with staff at the YEC, Dani shared that she was happy to have work, but felt that she was working too many hours. She explained that the extra hours were impacting her school work in a negative way. This presented an opportunity to work on job maintenance skills. Further discussion revealed that she felt she could not say no to the extra hours due to her uncertainty about employer expectations in this country. It was suggested to Dani that she speak to her supervisor in order to clarify expectations around her hours, and that usually she should only need to work the number of hours outlined in her job description. She could take on extra hours if she desired.

Candace, 22, came to the YEC for assistance with finding employment. She had recently lost her job and was struggling to find employment without specific employment training and was in need of job search support. Candace was assisted to update her resume and access the Bursary Fund to obtain H2S Alive and OSSA Confined Space training. With these new skills and training she was eventually able to find employment in the construction industry.

## Supporting a Young Parent

Jeanne received assistance with meal planning and grocery shopping through DYO in the fall of 2012. She was accompanied to both Safeway and Co-op to practice price comparison, with transportation for herself and her daughter provided by the DYO Commitment Coach/Youth and Family Support Worker. Through DYO she was able to complete a food hamper agency referral and because Jeanne was expecting and she and her daughter had limited transportation the hamper was delivered by the Youth and Family Support Worker. When Jeanne and her daughter received an eviction notice for late rent she was supported to access the Calgary Community and Neighbourhood Services Crisis Social Worker and Calgary Housing. With further support from the Youth and Family Support Worker, Jeanne accessed Alberta Works Emergency funding to cover her late rent payments. Over the winter holidays Jeanne and her daughter attended the CACY Christmas party and obtained gifts and supply donations. As a result of the direct support she obtained in the areas of budgeting, nutritional planning, housing support and advocacy, and clothing and gift donations, Jeanne has learned some important basic living skills. She has also learned how to connect to community resources that are available to her in times

of need. This has increased her ability to advocate on her own behalf and on the behalf of her children.

## **Difficult Family Situation**

In the fall of 2011 Kenny came to CACY seeking career planning assistance at YEC and possible academic upgrading to obtain his high school diploma. His family was from another country and he had struggled with the Canadian high school process, coming up short by three courses needed to graduate. As a result he experienced depression, career limitations and had been concealing from his family the fact that he had not completed high school, letting them believe that he was now attending university. He was working part time when he came to CACY and wanted to work towards future financial stability and build his employment potential. He had been out of school for three years.

Kenny was encouraged to enroll in Discovering Choices School for upgrading and to complete his high school diploma. However, he experienced challenges with anxiety and depression when he began school. He received support to face the inevitability of his family learning about his situation and the weight of keeping this secret. He worked with CACY staff until he reached a satisfactory decision that fit for him concerning his family and his academic goals, and came to understand that his challenges in completing high school were not entirely his fault. He accessed mental health services in consultation with the school psychologist, completed a mental health assessment and was able to have learning assistance accommodations put in place to help him reach his academic potential. Kenny gained confidence and finished his courses with the Discovering Choices school, which brought him closer to pursuing a degree at the post-secondary level.

## **Complex Situational and Mental Health Needs**

When Kelei came to CACY, he presented as very shy, extremely anxious, lacking confidence and fearing failure. He registered with Discovering Choices after being out of school for two years. At Discovering Choices he was able to access services that helped him learn to manage his anxiety while he earned high school credits. He was connected with the Youth Employment Centre where he improved his resume and interview skills and successfully sought a part-time summer position.

Sandy, almost 18, arrived in Calgary with a friend. She had previously lived in Calgary, but had left the city for a work opportunity. The two friends were living in a car when Sandy came to the YEC seeking assistance with her resume. Her work experience was limited

and sporadic. Through CACY she was able to connect with the Youth and Family Support Worker to surround herself with the supports she needed. She began addictions counselling and connected to the Alex to obtain basic needs supports and a referral to Dress for Success. Sandy was referred to Discovering Choices when she connected with Encore CBE to explore her possibilities for finishing high school. She moved in with her grandmother so she could focus on finishing school. She is also taking steps towards obtaining joint custody of her son with her mother by joining parenting classes.

### **Exiting Domestic Violence**

Georgia, 17, was involved in an abusive relationship and parenting a 2 month old baby when she enrolled in Discovering Choices. She wanted to prioritize her education and attend parenting classes but did not have support from her family or her partner. Through CACY, Georgia was able to access Childminding while she attended Discovering Choices. She also expressed her readiness to leave her partner. She was able to access services parent education, social worker counselling through CACY, and CPR/First Aid training through the YEC. With the support of CACY, Candace was able to make some important changes in her life. She now attends the Louise Dean School and is excelling in her courses. She has her child in an accredited child care centre during the day. She still accesses parent education through CACY and her in-school social worker. She co-parents with the child's father and is now in a healthy relationship with a new partner.

### **Support Through Crisis**

Gabe, 17, was referred to CACY through the Gateway Program for youth who become involved with the justice system. When Gabe was referred to the YEC for assistance with job search he was not working or in school. He wanted to look for work as a labourer. He had completed some grade 11 and had not considered going back to school. Gabe was encouraged to consider completing his high school credits through Discovering Choices. He is now completing some grade 11 courses at Discovering Choices and working part time at a grocery store.

### **Conclusion**

CACY trends and issues continue to revolve around the basic concerns of poverty, substance abuse, mental health and situational issues (i.e. housing, family issues, personal crises, pregnancy/parenting, etc.). Demand for Discovering Choices educational services continues to grow which in turn creates additional need for support services provided by other CACY partners.